

Message Text

SECRET

PAGE 01 DAMASC 06826 01 OF 02 012027Z
ACTION NODS-00

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FM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 5455

S E C R E T SECTION 1 OF 2 DAMASCUS 6826

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FOR THE SECRETARY FROM MURPHY

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PPDC, SY, US
SUBJ: MESSAGE FROM PRESIDENT CARTER TO ASSAD

REF: STATE 259812

1. SUMMARY:

ASSAD RECEIVED CARTER MESSAGE WITH CONSIDERABLE RESERVE.
DISCUSSED PALESTINIAN REPRESENTATION AT LENGTH. SAID ON
FIRST HEARING FOUND NOTHING IN LETTER TO GEMVE HIM CONFIDENCE
OVER PROSPECTS FOR GENEVA. END SUMMARY

2. MET FOR SEVENTY-FIVE MINUTES MID AFTERNOON, NOVEMBER 1,
WITH ASSAD AT HIS HOME TO DELIVER PRESIDENT CARTER'S MESSAGE
(REFTEL). ASSAD LISTENED INTENTLY TO THE MESSAGE, INTERRUPTING ONLY
ONCE WHEN HE ASKED WHETHER IN HIS PROPOSED PUBLIC STATE-
MENT CARTER WOULD EMPLOY PRECISELY THE TERMS STATED IN THAT
SECTION OF THE LETTER. REPLIED THAT I BELIEVED PRESIDENT
CARTER HAD INDICATED TO POINTS HE WOULD MAKE BUT NOT
NECESSARILY THE PRECISE WORDING HE WOULD USE. AFTER HEARING
ENTIRE LETTER, ASSAD SAID HIS FIRST REACTION WAS THAT HE
PERHAPS FAILED TO APPRECIATE ITS IMPORT BUT HE DID NOT
NOTE ANY NEW ELEMENTS IN OUR POSITION. WITHOUT PAUSING HE

SECRET

SECRET

PAGE 02 DAMASC 06826 01 OF 02 012027Z

ASKED, "HAVE YOU ABANDONED THE LATEST WORKING PAPER?"
REPLIED THAT THE TWO WORKING PAPERS HAD SEVED THE PURPOSE
OF DEMONSTRATING EXTENT OF COMMON GROUND WHICH COULD
BE DEVELOPED IN WRITING BEFORE GENEVA. PRESIDENT CARTER,
AS HIS LETTER INDICATED, WAS NOW CONVINCED THAT NO ONE
PAPER COULD BRIDGE THE REMAINING DIFFERENCES WOUSIDE OF
A CRCONVENED GENEVA CONFERENCE. CARTER IS TRYING TO MOVE

PAST THE PROCEDURAL ISSUES AND INTO ACTIVE NEGOTIATIONS AS GENEVA. WE UNDERSTAND THE POINT MADE BY PRESIDENT ASSAD IN HIS OCTOBER 21 LETTER THAT FROM IS IMPORTANT TO THE EXTENT THAT IT IS LINKED TO SUBSTANCE. WHAT WE HAVE TRIED TO DO IS FIND A PROCEDURE THAT WOULD CREATE AS FEW OBSTACLES AS POSSIBLE WHILE PROTECTING THE SUBSTANTIVE INTERESTS OF ALL THE PARTIES. IN ORDER TO MEET THE EXPECTATIONS OF ASSAD AND THE OTHER ARAB LEADERS, PRESIDENT CARTER NEEDED THE RIGHT FORUM, GENEVA, WHERE THE DYNAMIS OF GIVE AND TAKE AT THE CONFERENCE WOULD PERMIT HIM TO PLAY HIS ROLE FULLY.

3. HE THEN ASKED WHAT PROCEDURES WE FORESAW GOVERNING SELECTION OF THE INDIVIDUAL PALESTINIAN DELEGATES. I REPLIED USING SECOND TALKING POINT IN PARA 1 REFTEL. ASSAD ASKED, DOES THIS MEAN THAT PALESTINIANS CAN BE REPRESENTED BY PLO OFFICIALS, FOR EXAMPLE, DRAWN FROM ANY LEVEL OF THAT ORGANIZATION? (COMMENT: AM UNSURE WHETHER

HE WAS CHOOSING DELIBERATELY TO MISUNDERSTAND TALKING POINTS.) I SAID NO, THERE WAS A LIMIT. AS I HAD STATED, THE PALESTINIAN MEMBERS OF THE UNIFIED DELEGATION SHOULD NOT BE DESCRIBED IN TERMS OF ORGANIZATIONAL AFFILIATION OR OCCUPY OFFICIAL POSITIONS WHICH MAKE SUCH AFFILIATION OBVIOUS. WE WERE NOT UNDERTAKING TO GET ISRAELI ACCEPTANCE IN THE DELEGATION OF SUCH PROMINENT PALESTINIAN PERSONALITIES AS ARAFAT, KADDUMI,
SECRET

SECRET

PAGE 03 DAMASC 06826 01 OF 02 012027Z

OR SALAH KHALAF. ASSAD DRYLY OBSERVED THAT KHALAF FELL IN A DIFFERENT CATEGORY: HE IS A LEADING MEMBER OF FATAH BUT NOT OF THE PLO COMMAND. REPLIED THAT KHALAF'S PARTICIPATION WOULD CONSEQUENTIALLY POSE THE SAME PROBLEM. HSAI WE WERE TRYING TO DEAL WITH FACT THAT BOTH ISRAEL AND THE ARABS HAD ALREADY TAKEN RIGID PUBLIC POSITIONS CONCERNING PLO PARTICIPATION AT GENEVA. A PRACTICAL WAY TO START THE TALKS IS NEEDED AND THE ONLY WAY WE CONCEIVE OF THAT HAPPENING IS IF EACH SIDE IS ABLE TO SAY IT HAS NOT ABANDONED ITS PRINCIPLES. ASSAD INTERJECTED THAT IT NONETHELESS APPEARED TO THEM WE IN EFFECT WERE PREPARED TO GIVE ISRAEL THE RIGHT OF VETO OVER WHICH PALESTINIANS WOULD ATTEND. REPLIED CATEGORICALLY THIS WAS NOT WHAT WE INTENDED. THE THRUST OF CARTER'S MESSAGE WAS THAT THE PALESTINIAN MEMBER CHOSEN WOULD OBVIOUSLY HAVE TO ENJOY THE FULL CONFIDENCE OF THE PALESTINIANS AND THE ARAB STATES. NOTED WE HAD NOT PREVIOUSLY GIVEN THE ARAB SIDE SO STRONG AN UNDERTAKING IN TERMS OF OUR READINESS TO WORK ON THE ISRAELIS TO ACCEPT THE PALESTINIAN NOMINEES. ASSAD SAID HE UNDERSTOOD THE POINT.

4. PRESIDENT THEN ASKED "WHAT NEW POINTS DOES PRESIDENT CARTER

WISH ME TO UNDERSTAND CONCERNING THE MEMBERSHIP OF THE
WORKING GROUPS AND THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN OPERATIONS OF
THE PLENARY AND THE WORKINGHGROUPS". REPLIED
THAT CONCERNING THE WORKING GROUPS, PRESIDENT CARTER HAD
WRITTEN THAT IF ANY DIFFERENCES REMAINED OVER THE
COMPOSITION AND FUNCTIONING OF THESE GROUPS, IT SHOULD BE
POSSIBLE TO RESOLVE SUCH DIFFERENCES AT GENEVA. CON-
CERNING THE PLENARY/WORKING GROUP RELATIONSHIP, WE RECOGNIZW
THE ARAB CONCERN THAT THE PLENARY SHOULD PLAY A MAJOR ROLE.
TWO POINTS IN CARTER'S LETTER ADDRESSED THE
QUESTION:
FIRST, THE WORKING GROUPS WOULD SUBMIT THEIR REPROTE
TO THE CONFERENCE, AND
SECOND, AS CARTER HAD NOTED, NOTHING PREVENTS THE
SECRET

SECRET

PAGE 04 DAMASC 06826 01 OF 02 012027Z

ARABS FROM STATING NO AGREEMENTS RE CHED WILL ENTER INTO
FORCE UNTIL AGREEMENT HAS BEEN REACHED ON ALL ASPECTS OF
THE PEACE SETTLEMENT.

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PAGE 01 DAMASC 06826 02 OF 02 020923Z
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S E C R E T SECTION 2 OF 2 DAMASCUS 6826

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5. ASSAD REITERATED HE STILL UNCLEAR WHAT NEW PRECISIONS
WE WERE CONVEYING. I OBSERVED THAT WHILE TRUE
PRESIDENT CARTER WAS NOT GIVING ASSAD A DETAILED BLUE-
PRINT OF HOW AND WHEN VARIOUS ISSUES WOULD BE RESOLVED,
HE NOW HAD CARTER'S SOLEMN ASSURANCES AND CONFIDENCE
THAT WE CAN WORK THESE ISSUES OUT COOPERATIVELY IN THE
GENEVA CONTEXT. AFTER REFLECTION, ASSAD SAID HE WANTED

TIME TO STUDY THE PRESIDENT'S LETTER CAREFULLY AND NOT ANSWER IT HASTILY. NONETHELESS, HE WISHED TO COMMENT THAT ON FIRST HEARING NOTHING IN THE LETTER GAVE HIM CONFIDENCE ABOUT THE PROSPECTS FOR GENEVA. "WHILE SYRIA STRESSES THE IMPORTANCE OF WORKING FOR PEACE--AND WE SHALL CONTINUE TO EXERT OUR EFFORTS IN THUL DIRECTION--AT THE SAME TIME WE DO NOT WISH TO LIVE IN ILLUSION. IF WE TAKE INTO CQNSIDERATION THE RESULTS ACHIEVED BY THE EFFORTS AND CONTACT TO DATE, WE FIND NOTHING TO MAKE US BELIEVE THAT GENEVA WILL BE ABLE TO ACHIEVE A JUST PEACE." ASSAD AFFIRMED HIS ANSWER WOULD REFLECT HIS EAGERNESS TO ACHIEVE A JUST PEACE AND THE IMPORTANCE OF "CREATING NEW DETA." FOR NOW, HW WANTED PRESIDENT CARTER TO KNOW HOW MUCH HE ESTEEMED HIS EFFORTS AND THOSE OF THE AMERICAN ADMINISTRATION TO MOVE FORWARD TO A JUST PEACE. "WE CAN, OF COURSE, DISCERN THE DIFFICULTIES WHICH PRESIDENT CARTER IS FACING."

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SECRET

PAGE 02 DAMASC 06826 02 OF 02 020923Z

6. I SAID THAT WE WERE ASKING NO PARTY TO SACRIFICE ANY OF ITS ESSENTIAL POSITIONS IN AGREEING TO THE START UP OF THE GENEVA CONFERENCE. RECALLED HOW OFTER PRESIDENT CARTER HAD PLEDGED CONTINUATION OF HIS PERSONAL EFFORTS FOR THE SAKE OF A JUST AND LASTING PEACE. HE HAD SPOKEN TO ASSAD ABOUT THIS AT GENEVA, HAD PUBLICLY REITERATED THAT 1977 IS THE TIME TO START SERIOUS MOVES AND THAT THE FURTHER PASSAGE OF TIME WILL ONLY MAKE IT MORE DIFFICULT TO ENGAGE ALL THE PARTIES IN NEGOTIATIONS. I REALIZE IT WAS THE USG, NOT THE SOVIETS NOR ANY OTHER PARTY, WHICH HAS THE BASIC RESPONSIBILITY OF GETTING ISRAEL TO NEGOTIATE AT GENEVA. WE ARE PREPARED TO FULFILL THAT RESPONSIBILITY. DREW HIS ATTENTION TO THE UNEASINESS EXPRESSED BY VARIOUS ISRAELI SPOKESMEN ABOUT RECENT AMERICAN INITIATIVES, VBNTING THAT ONLY YESTERDAY IN THE STATES ALLON HAD SAID THE UNITED STATES SHOULD PURSUE A SLOWER COURSE AND RABIN HAD REPORTEDLY SAID U.S. CREDENTIALS AS A MEDIATOR WERE WEAKER BECAUSE OF THE THE ADMINISTRATION'S ACTIONS. PRESIDENT CARTER DID NOT AGREE WITH THAT ATTITUDE. HE WAS ASKING ASSAD TO JOIN HIM IN A EFFORT TO ACHIEVE THE TYPE OF PEACE HE HAD DISCUSSED WITH ASSAD AT GENEVA. WE KNEW THAT ASSAD WAS NOT ONE ON THOSE WHO PREFERRED THE STATUS QUO. CONCLUDED BY INFORMING ASSAD PRESIDENT CARTER WAS ADDRESSING SIMILAR LETTERS TO KING HUSSEIN AND PRESIDENT SADAT.

7. AS I WAS TAKING LEAVE, WE BRIEFLY DISCUSSED KHADDAM'S VISIT TO THE KINNEDY SPACE CENTER IN SEPTEMBER. SPEAKING ANIMATEDLY, PRESIDENT SAID HE WANTED SYRIA TO PARTICIPATE IN THE US EARTH RESOURCES SATELLITE SYSTEM FOR THE BENEFIT OF SYRIA'S AGRICULTURAL AND MINERALOGICLA

RESEARCH. ASSURED HIM WE WERE READY ENTERTAIN ANY REQUEST
IN THE REGARD.

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SECRET

PAGE 03 DAMASC 06826 02 OF 02 020923Z

IM AFTER RETURNING TO EMBASSY, RPRSIDENT'S PRIVATE
SECRETARY TELEPHONED TO ASK WHETHER I WANTED IT
PUBLICIZED I HAD CALLED ON ASSAD TO PRESENT LETTER
FROM PRESIDENT CARTER. SAID I THOUGHT IT PREFERABLE
THAT WE KEEP MENTION OF THE LETTER AND EVEN MY CALL OUT
OF MEDIA FOR THE PRESENT.

9. COMMENT:

ASSAD WAS NOTABLY GUARDED AND SUSPICIOUS IN HIS COMMENTS
THROUGHOUT OUR MEETING EXCEPT ON BILATERAL QUESTION
MENTIONED PARA 7. WHILE PERSONALLY FRIENDLY, HIS
REACTION TO THE LETTER AND TALKING POINTS WERE THOSE OF
A MAN WHO WILL NEED A GREAT DEAL MORE PERSUADING BEFORE
SIGNING ON TO GENVA.

10. SUGGEST DEPARTMENT PASS AMMAN, CAIRO, JIDDA, AND
TEL AVIV.
MURPHY

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